

Our man in the Vatican's inter-religious optimism <i>Peter Kirkwood</i>	<u>1</u>
Asylum seekers are Australia's invisible homeless <i>Greg Foyster</i>	<u>3</u>
The gay Jewish butcher and other tales of Israeli conflict <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	<u>5</u>
Bishops' voting advice needs grounding in dignity <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	<u>7</u>
Tax pain is our gain <i>Fatima Measham</i>	<u>9</u>
Staking out our vampire fetish <i>Brian Matthews</i>	<u>11</u>
Not all fun and games <i>Fiona Katauskas</i>	<u>13</u>
Why a conscientious Christian could vote for the Greens <i>Frank Brennan</i>	<u>14</u>
Power flowers <i>Diane Fahey</i>	<u>17</u>
Atheist 'Real Julia' courts Christian vote <i>Michael Mullins</i>	<u>19</u>
Vote 1 bus 'bludger' <i>Sarah Burnside</i>	<u>21</u>
Wren-Hardy stoush exposes sectarian bigotry <i>Juliette Peers</i>	<u>23</u>
Why harassment claimant wants to rock Djs <i>Moirra Rayner</i>	<u>26</u>
Putting border protection into perspective <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	<u>29</u>
Women's ordination and other crimes of passion <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	<u>31</u>
Double disillusion <i>Fiona Katauskas</i>	<u>33</u>
Bushfire blame misses the point <i>Paul Collins</i>	<u>34</u>
Ode to my mechanic <i>Sasha Shtargot</i>	<u>36</u>
Massaging Himmler <i>Anne M. Carson</i>	<u>38</u>
Getting intimate with Julia <i>Ashleigh Green</i>	<u>43</u>
Gillard's atheism belongs in the closet <i>Michael Mullins</i>	<u>45</u>
Jews fenced in by Aussie intolerance <i>Catherine Marshall</i>	<u>47</u>



Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

©2010 EurekaStreet.com.au

©2010 EurekaStreet.com.au

Our man in the Vatican's inter-religious optimism

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

[Anthony Kelly](#) is one of Australia's most eminent theologians, and our theological voice in the Vatican. Last year he was [appointed](#) to his second term on the Catholic Church's prestigious International Theological Commission (ITC).

Founded by Pope Paul VI in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the [ITC](#) was formed in large part to continue the fruitful collaboration between bishops and theologians that was a feature of the council. With no more than 30 members appointed for five year terms, the commission has an advisory role to the Holy See in examining important doctrinal questions.

Over the years the ITC has included theological luminaries such as Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner and the present Pope before he became part of the Curia. So, as a member of the commission, Kelly joins exalted company.

In this interview he talks about the importance of inter-religious dialogue in the context of the troubled times in which we live. He observes that it feels like we are experiencing a global breakdown of beliefs and culture. But he argues optimistically that rather than breakdown, it could be the beginnings of a breakthrough to new forms of belief.

Kelly spoke to Eureka Street TV at a conference held at the Australian Catholic University's Brisbane campus that honoured Raimon Panikkar, a leading pioneer in promoting dialogue and understanding among religions. The interview is sponsored by the university's [Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue](#).

A priest in the Redemptorist order, Anthony Kelly has done doctoral and post-doctoral studies in Rome, Toronto and Paris. He lectured at, and for ten years was President of, Yarra Theological Union, one of the member colleges of the Melbourne College of Divinity.

From 1999–2004 he was head of the ACU's Faculty of Philosophy and Theology, and is now Deputy Director of its Institute for Catholic Identity and Mission in Canberra. He has been President of the Australian Catholic Theological Association, and chair of the Forum of Australian Catholic Institutes of Theology.

As well as the intellectual pursuit of theology, he has an abiding interest in the arts, in poetry and painting, and his writing and talks are noteworthy for their poetic eloquence and expression.

He is a prolific author, with scores of articles and some 20 books to his name. Some of his recent book titles are *The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought*, *Eschatology*

and Hope and The Bread of Life: Nurturing a Eucharistic Imagination.

Asylum seekers are Australia's invisible homeless

HUMAN RIGHTS

Greg Foyster



While politicians search for islands to house 'boat people', asylum seekers living in the Australian community face an accommodation crisis of a different kind – homelessness.

Hard data on the problem is scarce because the Australian Bureau of Statistics doesn't track the number of homeless asylum seekers in the community. But refugee agencies across the country estimate that the rate of homelessness among in-community asylum seekers is extraordinarily high.

A spokesperson for the Refugee Claimants Support Centre in Queensland says between 60 and 70 per cent of the agency's clients 'need some sort of assistance with obtaining or maintaining accommodation'. Prabha Gulati, director of the Asylum Seekers Centre of NSW, estimates one in four asylum seekers her agency helps are 'homeless or in danger of imminent homelessness'.

A July 2009 survey found that 78 per cent of asylum seekers on the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) in Victoria met the government definition for homelessness.

Although some asylum seekers have slept on the streets, many have also experienced other forms of unsafe and insecure accommodation, such as crashing at friends' places, staying at boarding houses or sleeping at churches, temples and mosques. According to casework data from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, an individual or family seeking asylum will move an average of eight times in an attempt to source appropriate and sustainable accommodation.

With few rental references and complex visas, asylum seekers have trouble accessing the private rental market. They are also ineligible for most public housing and don't fit within the homelessness welfare system, which is designed to cater for people with different needs, such as substance dependence. And although asylum seekers are technically eligible for 'transitional' accommodation, they are frequently refused due to lack of income.

Even the Federal Government overlooks homeless asylum seekers. The Labor Government White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*, is supposed to set the strategic agenda for reducing homelessness in Australia for the next decade. Asylum seekers are not mentioned in the paper. Nor is there any legislative framework mandating housing for asylum seekers in Australia.

All these points are raised in *Australia's Hidden Homeless*, a new research project into the accommodation crisis among asylum seekers in the community. The [report](#) is the work of Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project (ASP) with financial backing from a charitable trust.

Only a charity could have drawn attention to this issue because refugee agencies and church groups bear the burden of housing homeless asylum seekers. These agencies rely on donations and philanthropic organisations to keep afloat. Government funding is minimal or non-existent.

A good example is Sanctuary House, an accommodation facility in Melbourne for male asylum seekers at risk of homelessness. Dr Andrew Curtis, general manager of strategic development and sustainability at Baptcare, says 'we have no federal or state funding for this facility at all'.

In the UK, Sweden and Canada, housing for asylum seekers living in the community is government funded and managed through the country's immigration department or at a local level. Governments acknowledge that they have a legal and moral responsibility to provide services to asylum seekers claiming protection. *Australia's Hidden Homeless* quotes a spokesperson from the Swedish Migration Board:

As a signatory to the 1951 Convention, the government has a responsibility to ensure that people are mentally as strong as possible to consider their future in or outside Sweden ... if you've signed the Convention, then you have a responsibility not just to provide protection when and if this is determined, but during the determination process ... you need to give people a decent life while you are processing their claim ... and the lowest level is providing food and bed.

Australia has also signed the Convention, though you'd have trouble squeezing that quote out of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. At the moment, the political focus in our country is on 'boat people', detention centres and offshore processing. Asylum seekers who arrive by plane and live lawfully in the community are off the agenda.

Yet historically, plane arrivals make up the majority of asylum seekers. And providing housing to this group is much cheaper and simpler than building offshore processing centres for those coming by sea.

Caz Coleman, director of Hotham Mission ASP, says *Australia's Hidden Homeless* puts forward a cost-effective model 'with a per bed price of approximately \$31.30 for a single asylum seeker living alone and less than \$12 per day for asylum seekers living in shared housing'.

Every day, Australians face north and scan the horizon. Has another boat arrived? But if our politicians and journalists want to see asylum seekers living in poor conditions, they need to look closer to home. We have plenty of destitute asylum seekers right here, and they're being ignored.

The gay Jewish butcher and other tales of Israeli conflict

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

It is no surprise that religious faith — the personal joy or torment it can entail; the social conflict or cohesion it can engender — is a key preoccupation of many Israeli films. Three films from the Australia Israel Cultural Exchange's Israeli Film Festival share these preoccupations, albeit within vastly different contexts and to varying degrees.



Walls (*Kirot*) is firstly concerned with social issues, especially concerning the violent mistreatment of women by brutish men. Galia (Olga Kurylenko, pictured) is a Ukrainian woman enslaved as an unwilling assassin by the Tel-Aviv sex-traffic mafia. She befriends her Jewish neighbour Elinor (Ninette Tayeb), who is in an abusive marriage. Both women are beset by violence, yet each has an inner strength that they admire in, and offer to, each other.

Although a few of the film's action sequences are hokey and over the top, director Danny Lerner keeps the film moving at an engaging pace, while paying due respect to the human strengths and frailties of his two female heroes. There is a chaste sensuality to the women's friendship that contrasts with the unsettlingly rough treatment both experience from men (there is not a kind male character in this film).

In the film's most poignant sequence, Elinor takes Galia to be ritually cleansed. Before the cleansing begins, Galia breaks down, explaining to Elinor that she is afraid for God to look at her and see the terrible things she has done or been forced to do. This cuts to the core of the shame and brokenness experienced by the truly repentant. Galia *is* cleansed, and is liberated.

The writer-directors of *Ajami*, Scandar Copti and Yaron Shani, have taken a page out of Alejandro Gonzalez Inrritu's (*Babel*) playbook to make a film with a disjointed time sequence and shifting perspectives, thereby offering a complex, humane portrait of a community riven by cultural conflict and social ills.

The players here include Omar (Shahir Kabaha), the next likely victim in a chain of retributive shootings; 16-year-old Malek (Ibrahim Frege), who is desperate to make a quick fortune to pay for his mother's much-needed surgery; Binj (Scandar Copti), who has been forced by his brother to hold drugs for him; and police officer Dando (Eran Naim), who is searching for his missing brother, whom he believes to have been murdered.

Copti and Shani are a Palestinian and a Jewish Israeli respectively. Their portrayal of events in the multi-ethnic Tel-Aviv locale of *Ajami* can be taken as a despairing allegory of Israel/Palestine itself; or as a cautionary tale in which poor choices and various failures to

respect the humanity of the 'other' converge in tragic circumstances.

Human feeling and desire come into painful conflict with the expectations of religious belief in *Eyes Wide Open* (*Einayim Petukhoth*). Set within the socially and physically claustrophobic, ultra-orthodox Meah Sharim community in Jerusalem, it is the story of Aaron Fleischman (Zohar Shtrauss), a devout man, butcher and married father of four, who falls in love with a young, male, homeless Yeshiva student, Ezri (Ran Danker).

The most fascinating aspect of this film is not the conflict that the affair — driven by an insatiable, tender lust — causes within the pious community. Of greater interest is the conflict Aaron experiences within himself.

In initially rejecting Ezri's advances, he rationalises his sexuality as a test from God, a test that privileges him, as it gives him an opportunity to prove his resilience. When Aaron does succumb, it is to discard religious standards and instead be true to human feeling. This is rather more serious than simply a rebellion against an oppressive society, however. After all, Aaron is betraying his wife and family, not just his religious elders.

Director Haim Tabakman's first film, *Eyes Wide Open* was controversial upon its original release in Israel; its thematic nuances and a soulful performance from Shtrauss belie any incendiary intent.

The AICE Israeli Film Festival in runs from 17 to 22 August at Palace Como and Brighton Bay cinemas in Melbourne and from 31 August to 5 September at Palace Verona Cinema in Sydney.

Bishops' voting advice needs grounding in dignity

POLITICS

Andrew Hamilton



In an election campaign that has so far been characterised by negativity and by the avoidance of commitment to any principle that might cost votes, the Australian Bishops' [advice](#) on voting is welcome. It avoided bagging particular political parties, enunciated broad humane criteria that should guide voters in their decisions, and pointed to issues that Catholic agencies regarded as central in the election.

Those who pondered the letter would find material for calm reflection on what matters. For the Bishops what mattered clearly were human beings and policies based on the kind of familiarity with their lives that comes from personal contact.

After reading the letter I wondered whether there may be room for church leaders to offer a little more guidance. Without attacking political parties, might they also ask more detailed questions about the conduct of the election and of party policies in the light of the principles they enunciated in the letter?

I would personally have liked to see the criteria more deeply grounded in the issues attributed to Catholic agencies owned by the Bishops on behalf of all Catholics, and some questions raised about the fit between the criteria and the policies of the parties on these issues.

The criteria stated by the letter are interesting because they are framed as human rights: the right to adequate food, shelter, to human dignity, to contribute to society and so on. Churches have sometimes been critical of human rights language. But rights need grounding, something that churches have long experience in providing. A little more reflection on the grounding of human rights would have tightened the list of criteria.

The first criterion suggested it is the right of every person to human dignity. But human dignity is not strictly a right, but an endowment. Because human beings are ends in themselves and are precious, they have a unique and inalienable dignity. Their dignity grounds the other rights, which spell out what it means to treat people in a way that respects their human dignity.

This point is important to make in the present election because the rhetoric of both major parties and the media implicitly presents human dignity, not as an inalienable quality of all human beings, but as something that depends on accidents of birth, of race, of nationality or of compliant behaviour. Those who are not of our nationality and do not follow our ways can be treated as objects, not as persons.

The rights which the Bishops offer as the criteria for voters are generally couched in terms of the individual. Catholic reflection on human dignity emphasises the importance of relationships as the context of rights. People's dignity is respected only when cooperative relationships are established in which priority is given to the needs of the poorest and to their participation in the decisions that shape their lives.

Elections are about shaping a society that respects or diminishes human dignity, and this social dimension deserves a stronger emphasis among the criteria that guide our voting.

Within this framework the issues attributed to Catholic agencies are all areas in which human dignity is at stake. They affect the shaping of society and so the ways in which human beings flourish or are reduced. So their importance could be recognised by the Bishops on behalf of all Catholics. Policies dealing with the treatment of asylum seekers, Indigenous people, women, the disabled, families, the aged and the unborn each will have aspects that respect, and aspects that fail to respect, human dignity.

Currently in Australian political life, one expression of human dignity seems particularly under threat: the need for governments to involve people as subjects and not objects of policy. Respect for religious belief is only one of many areas that might deserve attention. The treatment of Indigenous people and of prisoners also raises questions.

Other issues mentioned by the agencies have to do with the solidarity of Australians with human beings in other societies — through refugee policy, overseas aid and so on. Because respect for human dignity must be non-discriminatory, these areas are of concern for all Australians.

Of course, in a short letter not all can be said that needs to be said. What the Bishops' letter does, it does well and with appropriate modesty. A simple and firm grounding in the implications of human dignity might strengthen it further.

Tax pain is our gain

POLITICS

Fatima Measham

Elections are illuminating in the sense that they effectively reflect the fears and hopes of the voting public. After all, fear and hope are natural responses to the prospect of change which elections represent.

The sentiments of fear and hope sometimes spin around the idea of taxation. In Sunday's Liberal campaign launch, Tony Abbott repeated the phrase 'big new tax' five times. It is assumed that he refers to the Mineral Resources Rent Tax (formerly the Resources Super Profit Tax) which is an industry tax, not a consumer tax. Yet the speech left the impression that ordinary voters must reject it for their own sake.



It is a familiar Liberal riff, reinforced by Abbott's statement that 'under the Coalition, spending will always be less and tax will always be lower than under Labor'.

This illustrates just how much fear is fused to the hip-pocket nerve during elections. Voters do not like the idea of tax because they would rather keep their money. Moreover, as reflected by campaign offerings from both major parties, voters also hope that government will give them back the money that they have already spent through rebates, while maintaining the infrastructure and services to which they are accustomed.

It is a vicious cycle and a cynical one. The language used so far in the election campaign implies that voters are purely self-interested, that their sentiments of fear and hope are individualistic.

Perhaps they are merely un-reflective.

The concept of taxation bears reflection. In a 2009 paper titled 'The Philosophy for Tax' written under the auspices of Australian think-tank Per Capita, Katherine Gregory identifies five core functions of taxes. These include funding essential social services such as police and public transportation, social investment such as health and education, as well as income redistribution and equitable access to these resources.

This is not usually the framework in which taxes enter political debate. They are instead presented as something to be minimised and endured. Even when new taxes are supported by moral argument, as perhaps in the case of a carbon tax, proposing them can prove detrimental, as former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd learned.

Yet somehow, as populations grow, environmental impacts deepen, and the pressure on sectors such as health and education increases, most Australians want to keep the *status quo* on

taxes.

They need to be reminded that infrastructure and services generally work because, in a functional democracy like Australia, the taxation system works. In developing nations, taxes are also collected but often lost through corruption and incompetence. They rarely translate to paved roads, classrooms and hospital beds. In such countries, we usually see the gap between the rich the poor widen to extremes for lack of public funds.

In Australia, newly built roads do not discriminate between drivers who are on a high income tax threshold and those on minimum wage. Public hospitals give the same quality of care to pensioners that they do to DINC (Double Income/No Children) couples. State schools educate newly arrived refugees as well as fourth generation Australians. Fire services rescue life and property regardless of postcode.

In other words, we take for granted that government provides equitably for all. If the standard of service we receive depends on how much tax we pay, then many of us would be in dire straits. Through taxes, we invest in a civilised society that would provide for us in times of need. Taxes are therefore not a necessary evil. They are a necessary good.

Of course, we may legitimately question how taxes are apportioned, as in the discrepancy in funding between government and non-government schools.

But unless we begrudge the services received by those on lesser incomes, we should not readily accept that paying less tax is always better.

Staking out our vampire fetish

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews



It would have been quite difficult to grab a few northern hemisphere headlines during the first half of 1897: the competition was stern. Among much else, in May there was a mining disaster on the Isle of Man, and an exhibition in Nashville illuminated by the marvel of hundreds of electric lights.

In June Mark Twain famously announced in the *New York Journal* that reports of his death had been exaggerated, Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee provoking across her vast empire festivities, isolated uprisings, and the murder in India of two British colonial officers. They were ambushed on their way back from a Government House party celebrating the Queen's milestone. The assassins were caught and hanged and the cause of Indian independence from Britain was launched with martyrdom.

Meanwhile, Archibald Constable and Company, Publishers, of 2 Whitehall Gardens, Westminster, brought out their latest book without fuss on 18 May. Oscar Wilde's release from prison the very next day probably stole their thunder but if Archibald and Constable were deterred — and history does not record their mood — they shouldn't have been. What they unveiled on that day was destined to reverberate all the way through the 20th century.

It would remain as vibrant as the legends and *bons mots* of Wilde and Twain, prove much more resilient in the cavalcade of history than Queen Victoria or the story of Indian independence, and, as the 21st century dawned, show no sign of fading from sight. The book was *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker.

From his unspectacular and unannounced first appearance Count Dracula, the vampire, flashed like black lightning across the world of horror and the occult, surpassing all its macabre and outlandish inventions.

There was plenty of competition in the Gothic novel genre to which *Dracula* belonged. In Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) the hero, Ambrosio, abandons 30 years of blameless chastity to become an insatiable satyr, murdering a woman whom he discovers is his mother in order to have his way with a 15-year-old girl who turns out to be his sister. This consummation takes place in a crypt beneath a Capuchin monastery 'by the side of three putrid half-corrupted bodies'.

In John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) the hero, Lord Ruthven, has a 'dead, grey eye', which unerringly spots feminine prey and marks them out for blood transfusions and various other

kinds of spoliation.

Thomas Presket Prest's *Varney The Vampyre* (1874) has no literary pretensions whatsoever and gets down and dirty without delay, gleefully exploiting the licence allowed by the rapidly growing and ever more feverish genre: 'With a strange howling cry ... the figure [Varney, no less] seized the long tresses of her hair and twining them around his boney hands he held her to the bed ...'

Though he included these lurid precursors in his reading, nothing in the character or personal life of the Dublin-born Stoker gave any hint that he would engender such a frightening avatar. His first published work — *The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland* — was scarcely riveting, nor were his mannered fictions that followed before *Dracula* trumped them all.

His biographer reports that Stoker was first moved to consider the Gothic genre after a horrific nightmare about 'a vampire king rising from the tomb to go about his ghastly business', but it was his discovery during his researches of the monstrous figure of Vlad Dracula or, as he was better known, Vlad the Impaler, that inspired Stoker to hit his Gothic straps.

Vlad died in 1476 and is remembered for his creative ways with a pointy stick. He began his reign by turning some 20,000 of the Wallachian nobility into a forest of human shish kebabs below his castle windows. For Stoker, Vlad crystallised his story, fusing an existing folklore of vampirism with an actual historical monster and a place — Transylvania, The Land Beyond the Forest.

The Gothic genre died of its own excesses then was resurrected in different forms. The luridness and perversions in the works of Lewis et al. became oddities of literary history, but Bram Stoker's *Dracula* — in the manner of your true vampire — lived on and took many forms.

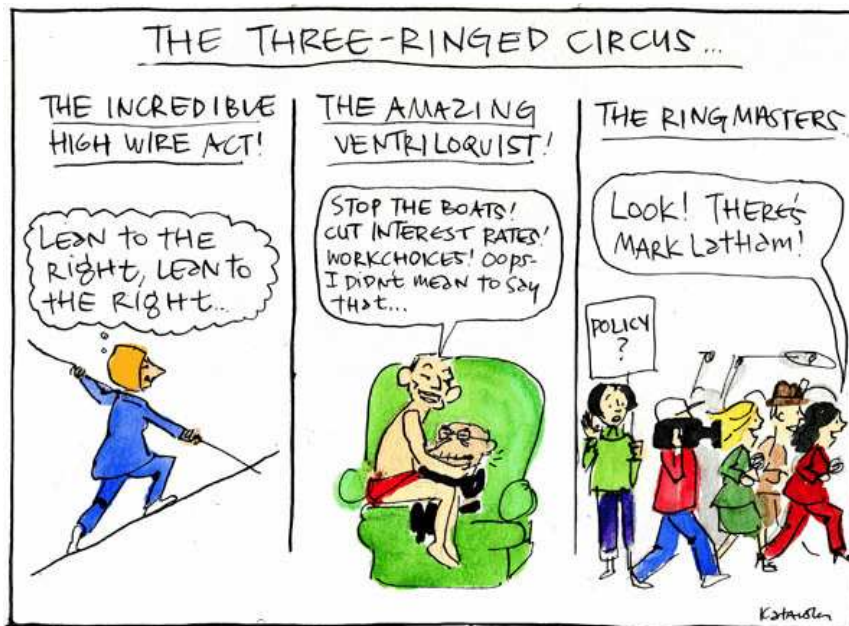
In our time Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, L. J. Smith's *Vampire Diaries*, television's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Dan Curtis's *Night Stalker*, innumerable film appearances, and computer games such as *Vampire: the Masquerade and Castlevania* are only some of the imaginative ways in which the infamous Transylvanian Count has, over the centuries, coolly fended off extinction.

For all our modern sophistications, refinements and technological expertise, we — that is most peoples in most countries of the world — remain in imaginative thrall to one of the most venerable and really terrifying of folk figures — probably because the vampire combines two of humankind's profoundly obsessive preoccupations: mortality and sex.

Not all fun and games

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



Why a conscientious Christian could vote for the Greens

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



Cardinal George Pell and the Australian Christian Lobby led by Jim Wallace have once again joined forces in the public square — this time to advocate that Christians not vote in the forthcoming election for the ‘anti-Christian’ Greens who the Cardinal describes as ‘sweet camouflaged poison’.

Jim Wallace launched the initial salvo in *The Australian* describing the Greens as ‘a party whose philosophical father, Peter Singer, clearly places the rights of animals above the rights of children, but at the same time endorses sex with animals, which presumably are robbed of any right of consent’.

On Sunday His Eminence took up the call in his regular *Sunday Telegraph* column stating: ‘In 1996 the Green leader Bob Brown coauthored a short book *The Greens* with the notorious philosopher Peter Singer (now at Princeton University in USA), who rejects the unique status of humans and supports infanticide, as well as abortion and euthanasia.’

The Cardinal has urged his listeners and readers ‘to examine the policies of the Greens on their website and judge for themselves how thoroughly anti-Christian they are’.

Clearly the Greens will not be gaining the votes or preferences of Pell and Wallace. But was it principled and prudent for them to make this public declaration? Could not a conscientious Christian still vote for the Greens? And are their policies more anti-Christian than those of the major parties?

Let’s be clear: the Greens are not in the contest for government and they are very unlikely to have much, if any, say in the House of Representatives. Their political purchase after the election will be in the Senate where they will most probably have the balance of power.

Some Christians, myself included, think that it is never a good thing for the government of the day to control the Senate. You just have to look at what happened to the Howard Government in its last term when it controlled the Senate. Hubris set in; the usual rational debate about the limits on Workchoices was abandoned because the Government was assured passage of its overbroad, ideological legislation. When the Government does not control the Senate, it needs to garner support for legislation by putting coherent arguments in order to attract a handful of Senators on the cross benches.

In days past, those cross benches were occupied by the Democratic Labor Party, which boasted Catholic credentials, and then the Democrats, who were just as secular as the Greens.

A thoughtful Christian is entitled to consider the workings of the Senate when deciding where to allocate preferences in their voting. A thoughtful Christian could give their first or second party preference to a minor party like the Greens confident that this minor party would hold to account whichever party is in power on contested legislative proposals.

Some Christians, myself included, think that the Greens are not classifiable as straight out anti-Christian. While some of their members may be (much like Mark Latham was in the Labor Party), others like Lin Hatfield Dodds have given distinguished public service in their churches for decades.

On some policy issues, I daresay the Greens have a more Christian message than the major parties.

Consider their stand on overseas aid, refugees, stewardship of creation and the environment, public housing, human rights protection, and income management. On all these issues, the Greens are far more in synch with the periodic utterances of most Church leaders than either of the major political parties. The Greens have been the only party to hold back the tide against the race to the bottom in the asylum seeker debate since Kevin Rudd was replaced as Prime Minister.

Admittedly the Greens can afford to be more idealistic on some of these issues because they will never occupy the treasury benches. This idealism appeals to some voters, especially the young. Even some of us hardened older voters see a place for some idealism expressed by minor political parties.

Like Cardinal Pell and Jim Wallace, I part company with the Greens on issues like abortion, stem cell research, same sex marriage and funding for church schools. But on none of these issues will the Greens carry the day given that policy changes in these areas will occur only if they are supported by a majority from both major political parties.

Cardinal Pell says: 'The Greens are opposed to religious schools and would destroy the rights of those schools to hire staff and control enrolments. Funding for non-government schools would be returned to the levels of 2003–04.' It is a complete furphy to suggest that the election of Greens in the Senate would threaten the funding of church schools. The funding formula for schools will be altered by law only if the Government of the day wins support from the Opposition, given that the Opposition and Government will be much closer on such a formula than will be the Greens with either major political party.

The Greens position on funding of Church schools will be an irrelevance. Even if the Greens were to try to use reduced funding of Church schools as a bargaining chip for some other policy concession, they would be most unlikely to succeed, provided the church school lobby maintains its good standing with both major political parties.

If all the Greens' policies were truly classifiable as 'anti-Christian', I would have no

problem with church leaders urging people to vote for another party. But given that some of their policies, and on issues which will be legislated in the next three years, are arguably more Christian than those of the major parties, I think it best that Church leaders maintain a discreet reticence about urging a vote for or against any particular political party.

This is especially the case given that Green preferences are more likely to favour the major party headed by an atheist rather than the one headed by a professed Christian. It would be very regrettable if an attack by Pell and the Christian Lobby on the Greens could be construed as an indirect shot across the bows of the atheist Prime Minister.

Though the Christian Lobby thought its influence significant when the major parties were both headed by professed Christians, there is a need for special sensitivity, judging politicians and parties by their fruits in this pluralistic democratic Australia where quite a number of its thinking voters as well as some of its leading politicians happen to be atheist.

I thought the language of our Cardinal on this occasion unbecoming and unhelpful in the cause of church credibility in the public square. If the Australian Christian Lobby wants to mount such rhetorical election campaigns, all our bishops should maintain a dignified distance and reticence.

Power flowers

POETRY

Diane Fahey

Litany

the lilies of the field —

Can they add value to the Dollar, erase the Deficit?

Will they buy me a Maserati, or a Beach House?

Could you open a Bank Account with one?

the lilies of the field —

Where were they when I sought

Contacts in High Places,

Collusive Handshakes,

a Leg up the Ladder?

the lilies of the field —

After I'd reached the Top

why didn't they save me

from Boardroom Rivals

plotting to bring me down?

the lilies of the field —

What solace could they offer

when my life turned against itself

& Emptiness devoured me?

the lilies of the field —

Cut them down, root them out.

Let them be shipped off & sold

for funeral wreaths;

crammed into guilt vases

as backdrops for the lily-white smiles
of Politicians, Captains of Industry
& Media Moguls in all their Glory.

the lilies of the field —

Plough up the land where they grew
& spray it with poison —
spray it again & again.

the lilies of the field —

They were clueless about defending themselves
& now they don't exist —
so there!

the lilies of the field —

Relax.
Forget them.
You've won.
What's next?

Atheist 'Real Julia' courts Christian vote

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The past week of the election campaign has been dominated by jokes about the 'real Julia' and the 'fake Julia'. With the party's efforts to retain government falling apart, Labor leader Julia Gillard vowed to throw away the rule book and to be herself.



Could this turn out to be a campaign run on an authenticity platform? The truth is that most commentators did not notice any significant difference between the two Julias. It just became clear that she would now do 'whatever it takes' to stem the rising tide of support for Liberal leader Tony Abbott.

This included courting religious voters and being photographed for the front page of Friday's *Sydney Morning Herald* looking up to Cardinal George Pell with an admiring glance. On Thursday evening she had attended a fundraising dinner for expenses associated with October's Mary MacKillop canonisation in Rome. She offered \$1.5 million in government money, but much more than that in flattery to Catholic electors.

Gillard called the months leading up to the canonisation 'a deeply significant time for all of us who may not share the Catholic faith but still deeply respect the great contribution of the church and of Australian Catholics to the social fabric of our nation'.

The atheist 'real Julia' got as close as she could to saying that she is at one with MacKillop's faith-filled vision for Catholic education. She said: '[Mary MacKillop] believed in the transformative power of a good education'.

On Friday afternoon, Gillard [addressed](#) the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL). While not referring to any 'great moral challenges of our time', she spoke of her Baptist upbringing and committed to faith-based school chaplaincy and vowed to oppose gay marriage.

Commentators such as the ABC's Scott Stephens [quoted](#) her vow to Jon Faine on Melbourne radio not to sell her atheist soul for the sake of the Christian vote. It was during the 'fake Julia' phase early in the campaign, and she declared: 'I am not going to pretend a faith I don't feel'.

The problem could be that Gillard has no idea about how to be real. Instead she appears focused on matching the apparent success of her opponent Tony Abbott, and his disciplined 'whatever it takes' style of campaigning. She has forgotten her own 'phoney Tony' mantra and fallen victim comprehensively to what her own side of politics regards as Abbott's deceitfulness.

If she is genuine in her quest to be real, she could take lessons instead from the now hapless Family First senator Steve Fielding. It's almost certain that he will be a loser at the coming election, and he is an unworthy candidate because he lacks the incredible policy strength Gillard has behind her. But he is as real and transparent as any politician can be.

Vote 1 bus 'bludger'

COMMUNITY

Sarah Burnside



There are many reasons to take the bus. It's cheap, reliable and easier on the environment than individual cars. There is no need to hunt for a carpark. You can lose yourself in a book instead of battling traffic.

More obliquely, public transport offers brief, slightly awkward interaction between people who might otherwise never meet or talk to each other. There is a fragile sense of community in the routine elements of bus travel — the tight smile that accompanies an impatient glance at one's watch; the sideways shuffle to allow another person to sit on the bench and wait; the occasional remark about the weather.

For the most part, though, we are silent, hoping that either the seat next to us remains empty or that its eventual occupant doesn't want to chat.

Buses are microcosms of society. Passengers scraping together coins to pay the fare share limited elbow room with smartly dressed businesspeople. Recent migrants and fourth-generation Australians, young and old, parents and singles board, sigh at the graffiti, wish the buses were warmer, and eventually get off at their destinations.

Last week, quite unexpectedly, a group of us participated in an event that seemed to blend social experiment with participatory democracy.

It was a bright, cruelly cold Perth morning and the bus was slowly filling up with people on their way to work. The collective mood was not cheery. Around halfway to the city, the bus stopped to pick up a passenger. And stayed stopped. After an animated discussion with the young man who had boarded, the bus driver opened his compartment door and stood in the aisle, brandishing the man's wallet before him.

The bus driver was indignant. 'Look at this', he said. 'This guy here has tried to give me a ticket that's two days old and he hasn't got any money or cards in his wallet.'

This is not the way bus trips are supposed to go. We looked up hesitantly from books and magazines, cautiously removed earbuds. The subject of this unwanted attention was young and blond, wearing the universal uniform of young manhood: jeans and a hoodie. He could have been desperately poor or just short of cash. He was also — as convention dictates in awkward situations — looking at the ground.

One could sense a wave of empathy for our new companion, mingled with impatience at

the delay in our journey.

The driver asked us, 'Well, what do you reckon? Should I let him on or not? Yes or no?' This, again, was unexpected — Australians aren't generally good with audience participation. There was a muted response from the jural public. 'Come on', said the bus driver, exasperated. 'What is it: yes or no?' The response this time was decidedly in the affirmative. 'Let him on', called one man, accompanying a chorus of yeses.

The bus driver exhaled loudly and handed the man back his wallet. 'You're lucky', he informed him. 'If I had had the casting vote, I wouldn't have let you on.'

The relieved passenger quietly took his seat, the driver admonishing his retreating back for failing to thank anyone. The remainder of the journey took place in the customary silence. No one said 'bludger', 'freeloader' or 'slacker'. We returned to our reading and iPods. Those without either continued looking through the windows.

The outcome of this informal plebiscite might well have been different had the young man been Indigenous, had he had a disability or had he been unable to speak English. Who can say what influenced the collective decision? Still, there was something reassuring in the fact that a group of randomly selected commuters immersed in their own lives and concerns paused to give a stranger a break.

The world, we are told, is becoming a grimmer place. Stories of man's inhumanity to man are so commonplace as to be almost overwhelming. The level of disconnect between individuals and groups within our society grows; disengagement with political and civic life deepens.

The individualism of modern life is echoed in the relentless focus of the current election campaign on personal benefit: what will this or that candidate do for me? 'This election', says Tony Abbott, 'is about you.' Indeed.

Yet there is beauty in the banal moments of everyday life. The backdrop of the global political scene and the grind of work, bills and worries make us grateful for those unexpected moments that see us cast a quiet vote for simple human solidarity.

Wren-Hardy stoush exposes sectarian bigotry

BOOKS

Juliette Peers

When the sons of Melbourne Catholic sports promoter and businessman John Wren took communist author Frank Hardy to court in 1951 over the portrayal of their mother in the novel *Power Without Glory*, it set in play a sensational nexus of political and cultural issues that still captures popular and academic imagination.

Debate ranges across many disciplines from literary questions about representation and reality in fiction, to political issues such as the Cold War and the ALP split, to moral issues such as free speech and artists' rights.

The novel's merit is still hotly contested. Popular opinion is diverse and skeptical. Academics conversely betray shades of indulgent affection towards Hardy as a working class 'genius', given the longstanding de facto segue between Marxism and Australian cultural production, and bestow upon *Power Without Glory* a mythic credibility.

It was recently cited as 'evidence' about the ALP and Wren, rather than as fiction, in a major Australian refereed political journal.

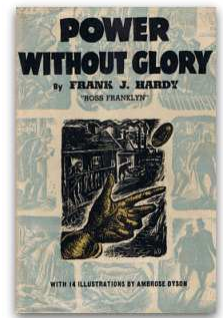
Hardy was no victim. He coasted for the rest of his working life — later, more creatively adept novels and his commitment to land rights issues notwithstanding — upon the impetus of the 1951 trial. The only losers were Wren and his family, as Hardy's acquittal ensured his narrative stuck to Wren, despite all major archival sources refuting the charges of murder, armed robbery and so on that Hardy freely and casually attributed to Wren.

The Wrens lacked the profile and presence of the author and remain marginalised.

A 1961 letter published in Patrick Morgan's 2007 collection of B. A. Santamaria's correspondence casts new light on *Power Without Glory*, but has not been used by present day advocates of either Wren — James Griffin — or Hardy — Jenny Hocking, nor has it informed any academic publications so far.

The letter to Father Courtney, a priest based in New Guinea, who enquired about Church policy on the novel, explains the trial in some detail. Given that Archbishop Mannix was still alive and in close contact with Santamaria, the letter may also reflect the Archbishop's position.

Santamaria stated that the Archbishop 'or anybody else who was libelled in the course of the writing' was unable to successfully issue a writ for defamation as Hardy would be able to plead 'fair comment' and the jury would have to be convinced that Hardy acted out of malice.



Santamaria is not a neutral commentator, but certainly understood the strategic implications of the trial better than the Wrens. As masters of using new electronic media for their own ends, Santamaria and Hardy were evenly matched opponents. Conversely John Wren junior's preface to Hugh Buggy's personal recollections of Wren's life is riven with despairing incomprehension as he seeks to talk down the authority and allure of the moving image in the guise of the 1976 *Power Without Glory* television series.

Wren's son saw the family's reputation publicly crucified again in suburban households across Australia and seemed unable to rise to defend his father against the charisma of Hardy's interpretation.

Santamaria demystifies several features of the case. The unusual charge of criminal libel was chosen because of the difficulty in proving malice and the likelihood of a failed case creating greater publicity for the novel. At the same time 'the attack which was made upon Mrs Wren' was considered to 'go beyond civil libel'. Ironically the criminal libel case had the same effect as had been predicted for a civil case.

Nationwide publicity in 2006 for Jenny Hocking's biography of Hardy made much of the 'discovery' that Hardy sourced his descriptions of the Wren household and family life from Angela, Wren's youngest daughter. Santamaria's letter showed the Wrens and church circles already knew at the time that one of Wren's children had passed 'a good deal of information' to Hardy, feeding him 'a grossly garbled version of 'facts''.

The most compelling aspect of Santamaria's letter is his foregrounding of sectarianism as a driver of the trial and *Power Without Glory's* scandalous success.

He claims that the family hesitated in pursuing the case because they feared that sectarian bigotry would derail it. Wren would be identified as guilty, whatever his actual character and deeds, in order to attack Catholics both personally and institutionally. Hardy would be acquitted not because of his communism or to defend civic freedoms, but because he was attacking a prominent Catholic and, by implication, the Church itself.

Given this tangible danger, with misguided chivalry, Wren's sons, middle-aged men in the 1950s, a decade steeped in polarised visions of female sexual proprietary (shared by Catholics and Protestants), could not overlook the insult to their loved and highly pious mother. They went into court for her, pursuing a cause that they suspected may have little chance of success.

The letter complicates the link made recently by Jeff Sparrow, Frank Brennan and others between the Irish Australian Catholic community of the 19th and early 20th century and present day Islamic communities. This argument states that, in different eras, Muslims and Catholics have been maligned and accused of working by violent means against the interests of the Australian state.

If one advocates natural justice for wrongly-pilloried ethnic groups, then the *Power Without*

Glory trial ought to be read, at least partly, as a high-profile, effective and long lasting punishment meted out to traitors to a so-called Australian normality. Santamaria claims that 'the press wrote up the case in a way designed to excite public sympathy for somebody attacking Catholics. The jury did the rest.'

To question whether bigotry lent popular credibility to *Power Without Glory* and drove the jury's decision to acquit Hardy, to reposition the trial as a concrete expression of sectarianism, means that Hardy's acquittal and the campaign to defend the novel partly belong to mid 20th century Australia's strong anti-Catholic undertow.

Thus ironically the movement to defend Hardy, free speech and creative rights, which became a de facto birth moment of the expanding postwar Australian cultural and intellectual schism, also reveals a desire to silence an unwanted Other.

As well as supporting Hardy's exposure of social and political corruption, the campaign to ensure *Power Without Glory's* free circulation simultaneously belongs to the world of the oppressive conformity that upholds discrimination against those not deemed as belonging to 'Australia'.

Why harassment claimant wants to rock DJs

COMMUNITY

Moira Rayner



Sometimes a claim for a lot of money for an alleged wrong makes saying truth to power more effective. The young woman who instructed her lawyers to go straight to the Board of David Jones about being sexually harassed by DJs' former CEO has now acted in a way that seems to have flabbergasted the retail giant. But discrimination law experts have been anticipating it for a while.

Most large employers have great policies about zero tolerance for sexual harassment and bullying, complex grievance procedures and lots of contact officers, and a reservoir of unmade complaints and unhappy staff. This complainant has upped the ante.

Kristy Fraser-Kirk could have made an internal complaint, but didn't trust the processes after what she claims was the 'knowing' response of senior staff. She could have gone to the Australian Human Rights Commission and complained about sexual harassment and been offered conciliation, but she didn't. Nor did she go to the state Equal Opportunity Commission.

She went to the Board, then, after its public response, which included the departure of an apologetic chief executive and an announcement that it was an isolated occurrence, made it real. She has apparently taken action in the Federal Court for punitive damages in an amount that Australian courts have rarely granted, though American courts have: \$37 million.

Punitive damages have not often been awarded in Australian courts. They don't aim to be compensatory — Fraser-Kirk isn't claiming she has suffered that kind of 'damage' to her career or health. She wants the courts to teach big employers a lesson, about keeping the promises they make in employment contracts, in their policies and procedures, and their public reputation as employers of choice for vulnerable groups.

When I started out as Victorian Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, in 1990, the average award of 'damages' for pain, suffering, humiliation and breach of civil laws protecting equality of opportunity was around \$500. That year, federal court judge, Marcus Einfeld, made headlines for saying 'mature' complainants of sexual harassment who were sexually assaulted by their boss should not be awarded damages — he retracted after he was roundly ticked off by his female colleagues.

Over the last 20 years there has been a gradual increase in the compensatory damages that tribunals award, to around \$450,000 in a case last year, and private compensation settlements in the several millions. But never have tribunals in the 'real' courts been directly challenged to

take seriously their potential to punish an employer who, if the facts are found against them, has failed to find out what is really happening in the workplace below.

Last year I got a call from a senior HR woman in a firm who had clear and unambiguous evidence that the CEO of the local section of the large multinational she worked for was a physical bully, asking me (off the record) what to do about it. You can imagine my advice. But as she pointed out, there would be repercussions for her with the Board, as the bearer of bad tidings.

It's true. She could well have found herself marginalised for raising the issue. The victims of this man's bullying were equally frightened to raise it. What she did, I do not know, but that she acted and feared as she did is solid evidence that even HR functionaries (meant to support staff and conduct standards) are suborned, consciously or not, into protecting the 'ear' of those in authority.

Fraser-Kirk has argued, in the media, that she has acted to protect any woman in her position in the future, by making it screamingly obvious: first, that you can't lightly promise to prevent staff from being discriminated against, harassed, bullied or victimised; and second, that there are huge consequences if the ultimate authority, the Board, does not have positive reason to believe that its own rules and the laws of the land are being complied with.

This means that they need to have actual knowledge of any potential or even anticipated complaints about breaches of work and safety and discrimination issues, and what happens to them.

This is not the norm. Boards and chairmen and corporate officers rely on those with administrative responsibilities to do the right thing. Yet the buck stops further up the chain of command.

You are supposed to know what's going on in your company.

The action taken is for breach of contract, and also — intriguingly — for breach of the Trade Practices Act obligation not to engage in misleading practices; in this case, by holding out that there are no problems, and also that there was no previous cause to intervene in the interests of the company. If this is substantiated, the 'soft' duty to avoid complaints will most certainly become a 'hard' responsibility to take effective preventive action without the need for any complaint at all.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act has been amended to impose such a positive duty on employers, effective from August 2011.

As to the damages award: who knows what Australian judges will do? The complainant has unwisely, in my view, announced that she would donate the damages awards to an appropriate charity. The point is not what a complainant would do with the award, but whether a court would teach the defendants and their insurers a very important private

lesson, and all employers a public one, by awarding a substantial, and painful, award against a company of such repute.

David Jones says it is still interested in settlement. She doesn't want to settle, mate. She wants to make a point. Start talking about that, and we've got a real leap forward in governance coming.

Putting border protection into perspective

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

Mother Fish (M). Director: Khoa Do. Starring: Kathy Nguyen, Sheena Pam, Hieu Phan, Vico Thai. 92 minutes

'Behind every headline, every policy and every queue ... is a human face.' Former Young Australian of the Year Khoa Do's latest film *Mother Fish* is an exercise in empathy. It recreates the treacherous sea journey made by two young sisters (Nguyen, Pam) and two men (Phan, Thai) as they travel as refugees from Vietnam to Australia.



There is a depth of personal experience contained in the film. Do and his family came to Australia as refugees when Do was an infant. The principal cast members all came to Australia as refugees from Vietnam (Phan was a so-called 'boat person' way back in 1979), except Nguyen, who was born in Australia to refugee parents.

This lends authenticity to performances that otherwise lack in professional skill. Do previously achieved something similar in his film *The Finished People* (2003), a pseudo documentary in which real-life Sydney street kids dramatised fictionalised versions of their own lives. The result is poignant but not always effective.

Do also takes a non-naturalistic approach to staging the story. This method is intriguing but not entirely successful. The action takes place inside a textile factory, where one of the girls, as an adult, recalls her long-ago voyage on a dilapidated river boat. As she remembers, the factory becomes the setting of those memories: the benches form the outline of the boat; the floorboards stand in for ocean. Sound effects and swaying camera help evoke the undulating, watery surroundings.

Mother Fish was originally conceived as live theatre. In that context, where audiences are expected to imagine locations that could not possibly be recreated on stage, this abstract staging would have been effective. On film, it is distracting, and actually keeps the characters at an emotional distance. There is no chance of 'losing yourself' in their story, because it's not possible to forget that you are watching a film.

This is a fundamental problem, as it undermines Do's primary intention, which is to put his audience into the shoes of refugees travelling by boat, and thereby to force them to experience empathy for the characters and their counterparts in our real world. Why, then, not make the filming as naturalistic, as realistic, as possible?

Still, there is no doubting the sincerity of Do's desire to educate, rather than simply entertain. *Mother Fish* is the first in a planned trilogy of films about refugees. The second,

Falling for Sahara, about African-Australian refugees in Melbourne, is in post-production. Films such as these, that give voice to the experiences of refugees, fulfill a vital role in that they inject truth and humanity into a conversation often dominated by fear and ignorance.

During an election campaign where both major parties are trying to win votes with prejudicial rhetoric about 'border protection', a bit of truth and humanity is just what's needed. *Mother Fish*, then, is well worth seeing.

Jesuit Refugee Service will celebrate its 30th anniversary with a [special screening](#) of *Mother Fish* in Sydney on 6 August. Khoa Do will be present to introduce the film. [Other screenings](#) around Australia will follow during August and September.

Women's ordination and other crimes of passion

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



The Vatican came briefly into public view recently when a document seemed to make the ordination of women equivalent to paedophilia among priests. A Vatican spokesman later said that no equivalence was intended. Paedophilia was a crime against morality. To participate in the ordination of women was a crime against faith.

The view that the ordination of women in the Catholic Church is a crime against faith bears some reflection.

The logic of churches naming 'crimes' is clear enough. Any organisation will have its expectations of its members, and breaches of those rules can be sanctioned.

A football club will demand that players attend training and arrive sober. To arrive late and drunk will be seen as an offence against what is expected of the player as a footballer. But players will also be expected to respect the symbols of the club. If he publicly burns the club flag and jumper, he will offend against what is expected of him as a clubman. It is an offence against what the club stands for. An offence, we might say, against its faith.

Church law works on the same principle. The language reflects a time when the Church was the lawgiver for Christendom. Although clerical paedophilia and participation in the ordination of woman are totally different, both have been declared to be incompatible with life in the Catholic Church. So they can be sanctioned.

But I found the naming of participating in women's ordination as a crime against faith disconcerting. I had recently attended the ordination of a woman friend in another church. The ordination service was much the same as the Catholic service, expressing the responsibility of the church for ordaining the candidates and their accountability to God and the Church in their ministry. The celebration was prayerful and joyful, and promised to be the prelude to a fruitful ministry by faithful and committed candidates. It was thoroughly faithful.

It seemed impossible to say that the ordination of this woman in that church was a crime against faith. Nor indeed was it conceivable that the ordination of women in that church was against the faith of that church. To describe as against faith an action that was based in faith in Christ, that served the faith of the church, and came out of the proper order of a believing community, seems quixotic.

It would seem more accurate to describe the ordaining of women in the Catholic Church as primarily an offence against order rather than as an offence against faith.

That is not to minimise its significance. Order has to do with faithfulness to Christ in the patterns of church life. A properly regulated ministry is central in the order of any church. To ordain women without authorisation in the Catholic Church attacks the principle that ministry should be licensed and also breaches one of the principles that are built into the licensing – that ordination be restricted to men. This principle, of course, is grounded in the understanding of faith, but the ordination is directly an offence against order.

It is like the action of someone who trespasses on military facilities in a protest against the war in Afghanistan, or arranges a ceremony in which they are invested in police uniforms in protest against police brutality. The trespass and wearing of uniform are against the ordering of society. They also involve a judgment on the ethical underpinnings of that society, but they are not named crimes for that reason.

In both these examples, however, the breach of order is accompanied by a judgment of the ideology that underpins the way in which order is constructed. The protest actions are passionate. They challenge the ethical foundations of society. That is why the response to the actions so often seems disproportionate. The actual challenge to order by a few unarmed people stepping on to forbidden land is minimal. The symbolic value of the gesture explains the harsh penalties often imposed.

Similarly a few maverick ordinations are more a diversion than a threat to the order of the Church. But they do represent a passionate challenge on ethical grounds to the traditions that undergird Church order. So in that sense they do touch on faith. They are prophetic gesture, and churches know the power of apparently quixotic prophetic gestures. The Scriptures are full of them. So they are taken seriously.

The difficulty with prophetic gestures, of course, is that the more harsh the response to them, the more they make people ask about the legitimacy of the traditions to which they draw attention. Where there is dissent, sometimes it is better for societies and churches not to focus on penalties, but to settle in for the long haul and engage with good humour with one's mavericks.

Double disillusion

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



Bushfire blame misses the point

ENVIRONMENT

Paul Collins



Black Saturday was not a once-in-one-70-year event. While the main fire followed much the same trajectory as Black Friday 1939, it was not a repeat of that fire. Nor was it the result of 'green' policies that restricted hazard reduction burning, or of the incompetence of government or emergency authorities.

Black Saturday was a new phenomenon, a glimpse into the future. It was the first fire of the era of global warming and it was terrifying. No one had ever seen anything like its velocity and intensity. It resulted in a new category of fire assessment: 'catastrophic'.

So what were the new elements? As submissions to the Royal Commission by scientists like Professors Neville Nichols of Monash and Peter A. Gell of Ballarat University pointed out, the answer is that south-eastern Australia is drying out and the most plausible cause is global warming. Victoria has had a 20 per cent drop in rainfall over the last 12 years. Recent summers have been the hottest and driest on record, way outside the normal range.

As Nichols told the Commission: 'The gradual warming of Australian mean maximum temperature of about 0.75°C most likely ... contributed to the extreme heat observed on [Black Saturday] ... It seems unlikely that such new records, so far outside prior experience, would have occurred in the absence of gradual warming since about 1970.'

Nichols also emphasised 'the chronic Victorian rainfall decline over the past decade'. The weather systems that brought rain to the south-east are shifting further south so that much of the rain now falls either over the ocean or western Tasmania. It is misleading to talk about a 'drought', because that implies that things will eventually return to 'normal'. In fact, the present weather conditions are the new 'normal'.

This will lead to bushfires that are more frequent and intense, of greater velocity and more widespread. No longer are Black Friday and Ash Wednesday the norms by which fires are judged; the new measure is Black Saturday. Psychologically this has left many people gobsmacked. They are unable to comprehend what has happened, let alone think that Black Saturday might now be the norm for future bushfires.

Unfortunately the Royal Commission doesn't seem to recognise this. The whole feel of its recommendations is business as usual. There is a lack of historical context and a failure to recognise that we have entered a new fire context. This is not to say that many of its recommendations are not useful; they are, but they lack this long-term frame of reference.

The Commission also fell into the trap of the blame game. This happens after every major

fire and it originates in the need to find scapegoats and deal with a sense of grief and loss. Badly led by counsel assisting, the victims of this were former Police Commissioner Christine Nixon, CFA chief Russell Rees, DSE fire officer Ewan Waller, and Emergency Services Commissioner Bruce Esplin. Sure, there were inadequacies in their performance, but they were unknowingly dealing with a whole new era of firestorm. No one could have predicted what was going to happen that Saturday.

Many of the Commission's recommendations make sense. People can't continue to live in the bush surrounded by trees, or along ridge lines, or at the top of escarpments. Governments either need to buy them out, or make it absolutely clear that fire fighters can't risk their lives saving them and their property if they refuse to take an offer to move.

However, Premier Brumby's response was not encouraging. Aware of the cost of buying back of properties in high-risk areas, he questioned what impact this would have on towns. 'What would that mean for the Dandenongs, for example?' he asked.

Designated community refuges are an excellent idea and one wonders why they were not implemented years ago. Another is dug-outs or basic fire shelters that can be used as a last resort for those caught in a firestorm. The Commission also makes many good suggestions for the re-organisation of fire and emergency responses.

One area of continued tension is what the Commission calls 'land and fuel management', in other words 'prescribed burning'. The Commission recommends that 'The State fund and commit to implementing a long-term policy of prescribed burning based on an annual target of 5 per cent minimum of public land' and that the DSE 'report annually on prescribed burning outcomes in a manner that meets public accountability objectives'.

For some prescribed burning has assumed the status of unchallengeable orthodox dogma. But in my view hazard reduction burning is becoming completely ineffective as global warming takes hold. Even when carried out with environmental sensitivity it still has inevitable impacts on native flora and fauna.

However, the Commission's response is quite conservative in comparison to the hysterical nonsense of columnists like Miranda Devine who told *Sydney Morning Herald* readers that it wasn't arsonists or climate change that killed Black Saturday's victims, but 'the power of green ideology over government to reduce fuel hazards before a megafire erupts ... It is not arsonists who should be hanging from lampposts but greenies.'

Clearly challenging engrained public prejudice will never be easy.

Ode to my mechanic

NON-FICTION

Sasha Shtargot

Mechanics are not the sort of people who reach for publicity, and they rarely get it. But I have a desire to hoist my mechanic before the bright lights and celebrate every grease-stained inch of him.



He has been intimate with every part of every bomb I've driven over the years. He's known the axles, picked through the engines, changed the groove-worn tyres and oiled the pistons. He's been my counsellor and saviour countless times when, forlornly, I've rolled into his suburban garage with the latest problem.

His name's Mick. You don't get many words out of him, and when he does speak they come rapid-fire and always end in a question.

'It's gonna cost a lot to get new tyres, knowata mean? You're better off getting re-treads, knowata mean?'

Mick works on his own and his garage is always full of cars, some jacked up high, others lolling about in various states of disrepair. His workshop looks like the grubby inside of hell. Even the girlie poster that once stood out near the entrance has succumbed and is buried under layers of grime.

He's invariably busy but somehow always finds the time to attend to mechanical no-hopers like me. His patience, like the stream of cars that come in and out of his garage, seems endless.

George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* observed that there are millions of people who work in jobs essential to the running of society who receive no recognition. Orwell investigated the lives of coal miners in northern England in the 1930s. The miners' work led to the generation of electricity that powered the country, yet they lived in abject poverty and neglect.

In 2010 in Australia few workers endure conditions anything like those described by Orwell, but there still exists a kind of social short-sightedness and lack of approval towards many blue-collar jobs. Amid strict divisions of labour, we are still a society ruled deeply by status. And when it comes to dirty, repetitive or dangerous work we prefer to look away.

Imagine a car-dependent country like ours without mechanics. Or the conditions we'd be working and living in without cleaners or garbage collectors. Or the hunger we'd feel without the food process workers whose products pile up in supermarkets.

There are hundreds of jobs that don't rate a mention in a society like ours that is obsessed with wealth, status and celebrity — and armies of unsung workers who nevertheless keep it functioning and well-oiled. The illusion exists that the work of the CEO and his office cleaner are unconnected. The truth is that one cannot operate without the other, and this extends to a web of connections throughout our complex society, binding the high and the low.

Friends of mine have the quaint habit of placing a stubby of beer and a thank-you card next to their letterbox at Christmas for the postie. I haven't met anyone else who does this, or hardly anyone who even acknowledges the person who scoots up and down their street daily delivering their mail. I try to say hello and thanks when I am at my mail box as the post is delivered, but the response is often one of surprise — as if anonymity is the ordained consequence of the thankless job.

My mechanic Mick may not be the poorest worker around, but in his concrete grease pit he's certainly one of the less glamorous. Fundamentally it's about what we value, and the ability to see and appreciate all the parts that make the whole.

Massaging Himmler

POETRY

Anne M. Carson

Two poems from a series about Heinrich Himmler's personal masseur, Felix Kersten. He used his influence over Himmler to secure the release of many prisoners — much like Oscar Schindler. Elizabeth Lube was Felix Kersten's Secretary.

Biskupin: the facts

Not quite Atlantis — submerged city of myth — rising entire
and dripping from the depths.

More like the makings — a jumbled mess of timbers
needing careful reassembly.

The national dailies dub it *Polish Pompeii*, chuffed to uncover
evidence of a site settled by Slavs
as far back as the Bronze Age.

A schoolteacher out walking in '33 finds wood fragments
floating in Biskupin Lake.

Buried deep in history's sediment —
two and a half thousand-year-old ruins.

Five years' work carbonating beams and struts, figuring
the layout — a breakwater, ramparts, one hundred houses
from local pine and oak.

A wooden Iron Age fortress on an artificial island.

Marshland water as preservative.

Here is a past to build a future on. Polish ancestors —
ingenious, skilled, sophisticated builders
able to defend themselves.

Visitors flock — thirty thousand in the first five years.

The euphoria doesn't last long. In '39 Nazi hordes swarm
across the border. All of Poland to be cleansed of Poles —
Lebensraum for pure-blood Germans.

Poland — taken out of Polish hands.

Posing intellectual, Himmler sets up SS Ahnenerbe,

Ancestral Inheritance Bureau

Nazi think-tank briefed to prove

continuous Aryan world rule.

They loot, lie, alter chains of evidence

to claim Germanic reign since the Iron Age

proving history is what the victors say it's going to be.

Like a bunch of Iron Age he-men they muscle into Biskupin.

Himmler makes himself patron,

renames it Urstadt — *original town*

bending even the name to suit their ends.

Hans Schleiff (Hauptsturmführer, archeologist) at your service

confident he would do the Reich proud.

No qualms about altering the archeological record

fudging facts. He claims German invaders

overcame the early Poles, rebuilt the town,

improving its design.

Biskupin, he glibs, another shining example of the Reich's reach.

A minor wrong

when set against five and a half million Poles

dead by Nazi hands.

Elisabeth Lube opens her heart

Mutti treated him like one of her own. Naturally I helped her out.

I'd darn his socks, turn collars on his shirts,
his cuffs as well. Occasionally he'd get a bolt of cotton —
the tailor run up a few new shirts.

Otherwise I was happy to cut and turn.

Small service when he worked so hard for all of us.

I was vehement at first — why treat a man like Himmler?

But Felix wouldn't be swayed.

Himmler called him round the clock —
as war progressed, his health got worse.

Felix had to go to him, sometimes twice a day.

He said he felt he never had a choice.

I battled with myself about the diamond — Vati gave it to me

just before he died, before the war
when we all still harboured dreams.

Small in carats but light from its facets
shone as sweet as any larger jewel.

I could hardly admit it to myself
but all my shy hopes lay hidden in that stone —

home and hearth, a Mann who cared —
kinder, kirchen, kuche

they call it — the socially sanctioned way.

Already I could see the setting I would choose, the sparkle of it
on my hand. Then I noticed Felix
stuffing pages from the Zeitung
into holes gaping in his shoes.
Well, I needed no persuasion to sell it in the end.

Once I wondered if he'd ask me. Sitting quietly in the parlour —
he said it rested him to see me sew.

The rustle of the cloth, the woodcock calling in the forest —
how quiet it was between us!
How little we needed beyond the sanctity of that brief time.

I was present when he met her — charming, gay Irmgard.
He proposed in front of us all!
She laughed to hear him ask, but didn't turn him down.
Just a few months later they wed.
She was the perfect hostess — something I'd no patience for.
Later she proved her worth in running the estate.
I gave her praise for that — and she gave him children.

But with me he shared his worries — the awful details
of his work, the threat from Heydrich.
He told me when Hitler planned
to force the Dutch from Holland.
I sat with him till dawn
while he figured what on earth to do.

I didn't know how we'd settle in one house but Frau Kersten
and the children moved to Hartzwalde.
I looked after Felix's home and office in Berlin.
His world was big enough for both of us.

I never would have said so publicly but in the end
I think I had the better deal. Felix let me be his own right hand.
No Motherhood Cross of course or extra deutschmarks
for producing progeny as Himmler exhorted us to do.
But I didn't have to worry about him straying
or me losing looks.
He appreciated what I offered at the end
just as he had in the beginning.
Through all the turmoil of those times, the pair of us endured.

Getting intimate with Julia

POLITICS

Ashleigh Green



As a society, we are fascinated with the private lives of our politicians and celebrities. Affairs that were once discussed only with our intimate relations are making news headlines: relationship statuses, physical appearances and personal life choices. In light of recent events and the publicity of PM Julia Gillard's personal life, the boundary between our personal and public identities is fading.

Perhaps the trend has emerged from the virtual world of online media where personal matters are publicised. Facebook encourages its users to share with the public 'What's on your mind?', a matter traditionally discussed with intimate relations. On 28 July, Ivy Bean, the world's oldest Twitter user died aged 104 in Bradford, England. She had spent the last two years of her life 'twittering' once an hour from her nursing home. Her final days and weeks, traditionally a deeply intimate time, were shared with more than 56,000 followers.

Politicians and celebrities, through their use of such social networking sites, have become 'normalised' and, in a sense, humanised. In the past, celebrities were individuals larger than life and while celebrity gossip did still exist, rarely were their intimate choices scrutinised so intensely.

In a recent press conference Julia Gillard was asked if she had any plans to marry and whether her partner, Tim Mathieson, would move in with her to the Lodge. Gillard's declaration that Mathieson would share residence with her hit news headlines the following day. Since being sworn into power on 24 June, Gillard has faced questions regarding her unmarried status, her decision to remain childless and her physical appearance. Gillard's response to such an intense period of scrutiny is no surprise: 'The decisions in my personal life I will make for personal reasons.'

Yet perhaps our obsession with the private lives of celebrities and politicians stems from the lack of real intimacy in today's society. In a world where the illusion of intimacy infiltrates the virtual, online world, real intimacy is absent.

Traditionally, intimacy is about a connection with another person that allows our guards to be let down and our true identity to be exposed. Social networking sites prompt the illusion of intimacy by allowing us to create a 'profile' of ourselves to be viewed by and shared with others. Yet in many cases the person we 'create' for ourselves is a hip, ideal version. The very experience of intimacy is not intended to be shared with hundreds of other Facebook friends

or Twitter followers.

It is no wonder that we look to celebrities and politicians for a genuine portrayal of intimacy. Psychologists refer to two kinds of loneliness: social loneliness derived from a lack of friendship ties and emotional loneliness which comes from a lack of intimate relationships. Robbin Moulds, a Salvation Army officer who has spent many years working with Sydney's most disadvantaged people, believes 'very few Australians will die of hunger or thirst. Social isolation and loneliness is the greatest killer.' Loneliness causes us to crave intimacy. We yearn to know what Gillard's life looks like when her guard is down. We desire to learn her motivations and core beliefs because our own experiences of intimacy are often lacking.

This habit of creating virtual 'profiles' for ourselves does not stop at our own identities. We have reached the stage of creating ideal 'profiles' for our politicians and celebrities, urging them to 'do' intimacy in a certain way. For Gillard, to be unmarried and childless does not fit the profile. So we question it, scrutinise it and engage ourselves so obsessively with an 'ideal' Gillard that we lose any sense of reality altogether.

While, in a sense, we have always been quick to pounce on the human foibles of public figures, social media has validated the publicity of private matters.

Our quest for intimacy is at the expense of public figures. The merging of private and public affairs has destroyed the deeply personal, subtle and sacred experience of intimacy. Whose right is it to steal from someone an experience so integral to our humanity?

Regardless of how society's experience of intimacy is changing, the publicity of intimate matters still remains a personal decision. Yet we will continue to be fascinated by Gillard's defacto relationship, [indiscretions](#) from Mathieson's past, Gillard's decision to remain childless and her physical appearance. Why? Because intimacy is craved.

Gillard's atheism belongs in the closet

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Perth's Catholic Archbishop Barry Hickey (pictured) recently [drew attention](#) to Julia Gillard's atheism and its potential to harm the interests of the Church. He said that her atheism might influence Christian voters not to vote Labor at this month's federal election. Some took his statement to mean that a vote for Gillard is a vote for atheism, and that therefore Christians should choose non-Labor candidates with Christian beliefs.



This position of intolerance ascribed to Archbishop Hickey is not far removed from that of David Barker, the disendorsed Liberal candidate for the Western Sydney seat of Chifley whose ALP opponent happened to be a Muslim. Barker [said](#): 'I don't know if we want at this stage in Australian politics a Muslim in the parliament and an atheist running the government.'

This sectarian view assumes that leaders should govern with particular sectional interests in mind that are distinct from the common good. Hickey's atheist critics make an important point when they [argue](#) that religious beliefs should have no bearing on the political process:

'[Hickey] represents the polar opposite of making an educated, informed and balanced choice on Election Day. Private and personal philosophy about the existence of a god should not affect a person's ability to govern a country effectively, especially one made up of people with many faiths and none.'

Hickey later said that the reporting of his comments had been misleading. He made a further statement acknowledging that Gillard appears set to give churches a fair go. 'She's honest, she said she would respect religious beliefs and I think that's all good.'

While such faint praise provides little comfort to Australians who cherish the separation of church and state that helps to define our culture and nationhood, his further remarks reveal a real and legitimate concern. Hickey went on to address the growing influence of a robust and quasi-doctrinal secularism in European politics that is evidenced in the successful lobbying to keep God out of the European Constitutional and Lisbon treaties.

Clearly Hickey sees Gillard's 'out and proud' atheism as a sign that her leadership could be conducive to the flourishing of organised hostility towards churches and religious belief.

Indeed it could have been a mistake for Gillard to 'declare' her atheism, almost as if she was giving witness to a firmly held religious belief. Atheism signifies a lack of belief. There is not a lot that can be said about it without running the risk of it becoming a belief and its believers adopting the religious posturing many atheists abhor.

In hindsight, Gillard would probably agree that her opponent Tony Abbott got his lines right and did better by [declaring](#) candidates' religious views a private matter that should not distract from voters' judgment of their competence and policies.

Jews fenced in by Aussie intolerance

MULTICULTURALISM

Catherine Marshall



On Sydney's North Shore, where unchecked development is steadily defacing a genteel precinct, it's not the proliferation of nondescript high rises or the disappearance of federation homes stirring controversy. Rather, it's a clutch of standard-issue utility poles and interconnecting strands of wire piquing the interest of journalists and politicians alike, and catalysing the prejudices that lurk within this superficially harmonious community.

The dissent resulted from the proposed construction of an eruv, a symbolic wall that would envelop most of the suburb of St Ives, home to around 3000 Jews, many of whom share South African heritage. Eighty-five per cent of the eruv exists already in the form of utility poles; 11 residents have given consent for additional poles to be constructed on their land.

Common to cities such as Washington DC, London, Paris, Johannesburg and Sydney's own Bondi, the eruv's presence enables observant Jews to leave their homes and undertake activities otherwise forbidden outside of the home on the Shabbat and holy days: the pushing of prams, the use of walking sticks, the carrying of children.

The media blew the dog whistle at once with provocative headlines such as 'Jews seek religious freedom with a ring around St Ives' in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and 'Renewed Jewish push for St Ives "enclosure"' in the *North Shore Times*. The headlines captured not just the essence of a local news story, but the deep fears of a broader society whose much-vaunted religious and cultural tolerance is not necessarily observed in practice.

The more rational objections were aired by people fearful of the change an eruv might bring to St Ives' leafy skyline. With the battle against big developers already lost, residents are wary of further threats to their rapidly changing streetscapes.

'We're going towards undergrounding wiring [and] having less posts and poles ... [H]ere we are getting a proliferation of poles and wiring when it's totally unnecessary for the wider community and just convenient to a small fraction of the population,' said Christiane Berlioz, President of the St Ives Progress Association.

The proposal also drew the ire of atheists who, critical of the supposed irrationality of an eruv, labelled it an 'imaginary fence' and a 'piece of string' that adults believe will enable them to 'pick up keys on the Sabbath'.

Implicit in these comments is derision for all faith-based beliefs: the transformation of the Eucharist into Christ's body during a Catholic mass, the reincarnation of a Hindu after he or she has died.

But a libertarian country such as ours ensures a rich variety of religious expression, from the overabundant carols at Christmas time to the effusive Islamic calls-to-prayer to the knock-knocking of door-to-door evangelists.

Given that eruvs are inconspicuous, and religious freedom in Australia is a *fait accompli*, there can be only one explanation for the prevailing sentiment, and that is a subtle prejudice which represents the great big elephant in the room for anyone living on Sydney's North Shore.

It's an intolerance which sees Jews routinely characterised as loud and arrogant; where all residents of South African origin are regarded as Jewish until proven otherwise; where, in a particularly alarming development, a local shop is rumoured to be scrapping its kosher section in the hope of 'attracting more Australians'.

'The truth is that Jews believe they are chosen, and that they are better than everyone,' said a writer on a *North Shore Times* forum. 'Have they brought apartheid in their suitcases after it was exiled from South Africa?' asked a local resident in her objection to Ku-ring-gai Council.

In releasing its valves, this supposedly liberal community has given voice to an ugly form of discrimination, one that should have been nipped in the bud when Jews arrived in this country on the First Fleet. If the construction of an eruv was a litmus test for the strength of our society's pluralism, then the suburb of St Ives — or those jumping onto its bandwagon — would surely have failed it.

Despite the backlash, the Jewish community is confident that reason will prevail, says the CEO of the Jewish Board of Deputies, Vic Alhadeff. 'We are hopeful that with goodwill and understanding there will be a realisation that it's a positive step, because it allows people to carry out the requirements of the faith without impacting anyone.'

If the application now before council is denied, it will be a sad day indeed, not only for the Jewish community of St Ives, but for the whole of Australia: yet again, our country will have sacrificed one more wedge of the multiculturalism it loves to lay claim to.